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ABSTRACT

Communication theory, classical rhetoric, and love of language are three major roots that may inform and stimulate elementary speech teachers. First, books, puppets, and painted illustrations may be useful in teaching communication theory. For example, children may be made aware of the paralinguistic potential by working with puppets, allowing the voice to indicate to the audience the character of the puppet. Puppetry provides the teacher with an opportunity to talk about communication theory, body language, and caricature. Second, classical rhetoric also shapes many speech activities. For example, the "Progymnasmatia," the first exercises in rhetorical training, can be adapted to elementary speech instruction today; and the advice of Quintilian, Hermogenes, and Cicero on narrative exercises is immediately applicable to the primary classroom. And third, love of language which has always been a controlling obsession in the Greek mind, should help to lead children to "discover the potentialities of language in terms of sound and rhythm, to savor the curiosity of language and to wallow in words." (SW)

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BITTER ROOTS AND SWEET FRUIT:

NOTES ON

ELEMENTARY SPEECH COMMUNICATION INSTRUCTION

by

Dr. Matthew C. Morrison

"The root of education is bitter," Isocrates said, "but its fruit sweet." Although not entirely bitter, the roots of education I try to implant in the course, "Speech for the Elementary Teacher," are (1) communication theory, (2) classical rhetoric, and (3) love of language.

These three taproots are, of course, related and each contributes to the sweet fruit produced. Enough courses are available at the University of Georgia in linguistics and language acquisition so that we deal only indirectly with these areas.

I

Using Don Fabun's booklet, Communications: The Transfer of Meaning (Beverly Hills: Glencoe Press, 1968), we discuss concepts such as process, selective perception, the meaning of meaning, how we create symbols, visual literacy, the silent languages, relationship of image to reality, and human communications as "transactions." Outside events are stimuli which release the internal responses about which we communicate. With no exterior stimuli there is no compulsion to communicate. The most pleasant way to go, I suppose, is to soften to death in a vat of

Jergens lotion!

In one exercise students are placed around a cardboard carton on which I have painted illustrations to depict extremes. The painting of war is opposite that of love, the painting showing cold is opposite one which suggests warmth. The students on opposite sides describe their feelings they have from their vantage points. Even those students looking at the same side have widely divergent responses. Meanings exist in people and not in symbols, things, or events. But reality is much more complex than a four-sided box.

In talking about speech as communication we necessarily bridge to a study of normal and abnormal problems of speech, voice and diction, and physiology of the vocal mechanism -- a kind of Reader's Digest odyssey, "Getting Acquainted With Your Larynx." We try to increase appreciation for the voice as a musical instrument.

Speech activities in the elementary classroom should be taught from a communication behavior viewpoint. For example, children are made aware of the paralinguistic potential in working with puppets. The voice indicates to the audience the character of the puppet.[1] David Frye, the comedian who does uncanny impressions of public figures such as William F. Buckley and Richard Nixon ("I am the President! And make no mistake about that!") says of his destructive art: "If the voice comes to me, it works."[2]

In puppetry we also have the opportunity to talk about communication theory, body language, and caricature. David Levine, the caricaturist, believes that "people read into expressions of faces what they are expected to see."[3] In Cicero's analysis of the chief sources of laughter, "a witty saying has its point sometimes in facts, sometimes in words, though people are most particularly amused whenever laughter is excited by the union of the two."[4] The puppet, like the cartoon, is a fusion of image with words. The classic theory of caricature, articulated by W. A. Coupe, says

that the caricaturist seizes on the essense of his victim and provides a negative counterpart to the idealized features of the normal portraitist. He destroys his victim's persona (the mask he wears in the drama of life) by "penetrating to the reality behind the appearance" and revealing the true man.[5]

II

The second major emphasis, classical rhetoric, also shapes many speech activities. Lawrence Rosenfield called for a restoration of invention, and in particular "the concept of Topics as a central feature of human thought."[6] The Progymnasmata, the first exercises in rhetorical training, could be adapted to elementary speech instruction today. The advice of Quintilian, Hermogenes and Cicero on narrative exercises are immediately applicable to the primary classrooms. The exercise of impersonation required the pupil to compose an imaginary monolog which could have been spoken by a historical figure. This exercise introduces students to the concept of a speaker's ethos. Students are directed to make the speech appropriate to the character of the speaker, the audience, and the speech context.[7] For example, "Imagine Abraham Lincoln speaking to his cabinet on the current problems of busing;" or, "Daniel Boone musing on the pollution of our landscape." Students could exercise in learning to use the topoi -- such as arguing "from consequences" ("We will have McDonald hamburger wrappers and milkshake cups up to our necks unless we stop littering!"), or "from lesser to greater" ("If birds do not litter their nests, then we should not litter our homes.")

Teachers of written composition are turning to rhetoric. Dissatisfied with the results of sterile pedagogy which focus upon the minutia of grammar, word choice, and syntax, these teachers, according to Douglas Ehninger, "have sought in the rhetorical

canons of invention and disposition the principles by which the substance of a composition may be derived and its grosser divisions or parts integrated into a functional whole."[8]

III

The third emphasis, love of language, was a controlling obsession in the Greek mind. Rosenfield termed it "erotic enthusiasm for experienced thought." In the Greek notion, thought was "an act, the act of loving wisdom actualized in logos, talk."[9]

Jack Paar was asked to rate the conversationalists from the hundreds of interviews he conducted during his television career. "By far the British -- Peter Ustinov, Robert Morley, Malcolm Muggeridge and Richard Burton -- were the most amusing," Paar said.[10]

J. Jeffery Auer, reporting impressions from his participation in the Anglo-American Seminar of the Teaching of English, said that we learn from the British teachers that speech (they called it "talk") "received very little isolated attention in the elementary schools, but that it tends to go on much of the time in the best schools, encouraged, unfettered and exploratory, and involving all the class, not just two-way exchanges with the teacher." The result of this type of discussion is "an alertness in dialogue situations." From this, the students are ready for the dialogue of drama, mime, pantomime, and improvisation. The students then move on to script writing and staged performances, while at the same time reading aloud the dialogues from their literature study.[11]

J. W. Patrick Creber, of the University of Exeter, warns against stifling the "ingenuous spontaneity and humanity" of the child. Creber calls for "zestful linguistic exploration and experiment" in leading the child to "discover the potentialities of language in terms of sound and rhythm," to "savor the

curiousity of language and to wallow in words." This is essentially an enjoyable extension of experience.[12] It was the Patriarch Job who asked, "Doth not the ear try words?"[13] The child's enjoyment of alliteration is linked to a love of nonsense. He also loves the hyperbole and the macabre, as in this note taken from a third-grade boy:

Bevery
Eats
Little
Outopuses
With

Zoocupcakes and eats
Enough
Raw
Outopuses to make a elephant Die (sic).

The child further is generally sensitive to sounds:

(Mother) "Junior Samples is an authentic hillbilly."
(Child) "No, he isn't, he's fat!"

These three major roots, (1) communication theory, (2) classical rhetoric, and (3) love of language will, hopefully, inform and stimulate the elementary teachers when they prepare their group projects in various speech activities for the elementary grades. Each group prepares enough copies of the project for each member of the class. They make 30-40 minute oral presentations to the class, demonstrating ways to implement the activities, and answering questions. The value of these resource booklets constitutes the "sweet fruit" of the course.

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FOOTNOTES

[1] See Barbara Sundene Wood, "Implications of Recent Research in Child Communication Development for Speech Communication Education," Proceedings: SCA Summer Conference VI, 1970, Edited by Malcolm O. Sillers, pp. 22-23.

[2] Roy Bongartz, "Deformita Perfetta of Richard Nixon, Lyndon Johnson and Other Heroes," Esquire, February, 1971, pp. 74-75. Frye says that his first task is to capture the "voice level" of his victim and then try to hear the "characteristic rhythms" that distinguishes it from other voices.

[3] Bongartz, p. 74.

[4] Cicero, De Oratore, Book II, translated by E. W. Sutton and H. Rackman, reprinted in Thomas W. Benson and Michael H. Prosser, Readings in Classical Rhetoric (Boston: Allyn and Bacon, 1969), p. 254.

[5] "Observations on a Theory of Political Caricature," Comparative Studies in Society and History, XI (January, 1969), pp. 87-88.

[6] Sillers, p. 56.

[7] See Donald Lemen Clark, Rhetoric in Greco-Roman Education (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), pp. 177-212.

[8] Contemporary Rhetoric: A Reader's Coursebook (Glenview, Ill.: Scott, Foresman and Co., 1972), p. 2.

[9] Sillers, p. 53.

[10] Atlanta Constitution, March 26, 1972.

[11] On Teaching Speech in Elementary and Junior High Schools, Edited J. Jeffery Auer and Edward B. Jenkinson (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), pp. x-xi. Central to the child's educational experience, Auer said, is "freeing a child's feelings through creative talking and writing, encouraging his sensitivity to language and the symbolizing process, and helping him relate verbally to the world."

[12] Sense and Sensitivity: The Philosophy and Practice of English Teaching (London: University of London Press, 1965), pp. 9, 131, 135.

[13] Job xii. 11, The Bible, King James Version.